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by
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AZTEC ANCIE



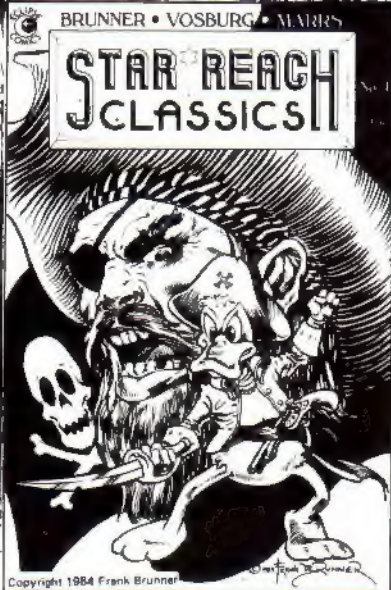
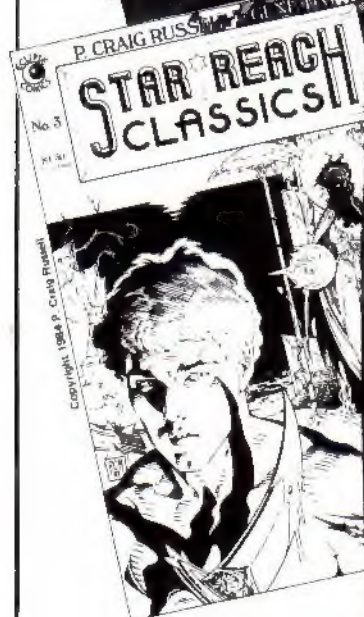
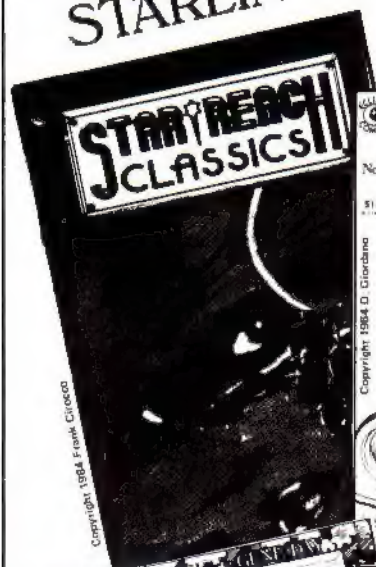
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"OUT OF THE COLD ASHES OF LIFELESS CREEDS SHALL RISE PHOENIX-LIKE THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES! THE UNFOLDING OF MAN'S SPIRITUAL NATURE IS AS MUCH AN EXACT SCIENCE AS ASTRONOMY."

-- MANLY P. HALL



**SCRAMBACKED
DICTATUM:** THE AZTECS
BELIEVE THAT DEATH IS A
MERE AWAKENING FROM
THE DREAM CALLED LIFE...

...THAT DEATH IS
INDEED THE TRUE
FORM OF LIFE,
SINCE DEATH CAN-
NOT DIE.

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IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUCH AN EXTREME BELIEF, THEY WILLINGLY FLING THEMSELVES UPON ALTARS STAINED WITH THE UNWAVERING CONVICTION OF THOSE WHO HAVE BLEED BEFORE TO A BETTER PLACE BY FAR.

MUMMY DUST

DYING IN THE SIGHS OF THE NIGHT

FOR BRIDGET'S SAKE
(AND LIKELY MY OWN),
I HOPE THE WISDOM OF
THEIR BELIEF TRANSCENDS
SIGHT OF THE HERE AND
NOW...



...BUT IN THIS STOLEN
EBONATI SHIFT-VEHICLE,
AS I LANGUISH IN THE GRIP
OF STILLED TIME, HELL'S
CEASELESS TORMENTS
PRESS ON ME WITH ALL
THE WEIGHT OF HORROR IN
THE CUNNING DRAG OF A
TEMPTING QUEEN.

OUT-TIME 1: AS THE SLIME
THAWS... VINTAGE KANSAS CITY '55

DEATH LIKE A JACKAL
GRINS, WAITING FOR
MY HEART TO BE DONE
WITH IT ALL...

...AND, THE FETID BREATH
HOT AND HASTY ON MY
NECK, I FEAR THOSE
BLOOD-GLUTTON MEXICA
ARE FULL OF CRAP.

"PERISTALTIC
PULSING," HE
SAYS... "UNSTABLE
MOLECULES," HE
SAYS... RHYTHMIC
RIPPLING MOTION
CAUSING ALTER-
NATION AS GOOP
OVER SAND AND
AS CEMENT
OVER A RAZOR-
BLADE...

AND IT'D
BETTER
FUNCTION AS
WELL AS NORMAL
TWE-TRAVEL
FUEL...

...AFTER ALL
THE TROUBLE
I WENT THROUGH
TO GET IT.

WEIRD
STUFF, THIS
DAMNED
SLUG-
SLIME.



OBNOXIOUS
KID.

VELL? HOW VENT DER
SCAVENGER HUNT, TOOTS?

OH, JUST REAL HUNKY-
DORY, HEAD--I CAME UP
WITH EXACTLY **ONE**
SLUG, AND I THINK THE
POOR BUGGER FROZE.

HMM...
ELEMENTARY
DEDUCTION, MY
LITTLE DAUGHTER
OF WATT.

SO NOW
WHAT?

NOW DER SLIME MUST
THAW, MY NONE TOO EUPHO-
NICOUSLY APPELATED PATOOTIE.



AND WHILE IT DOES, WE STAY STUCK INSIDE THE PHONE BOOTH?

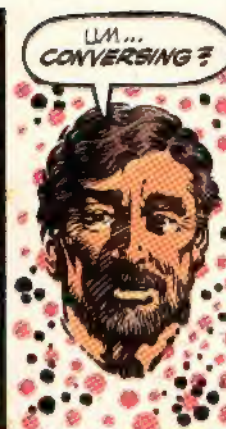


ACTUALLY... INSIDE THE AZURE CROSSTIME EXPRESS--

--WHICH IS **STASIS-STASHED** INSIDE DER PHONE BOOTH.



DOING **WHAT** WHILE WE WAIT?



UM... **CONVERSING?**



TALK'S JAKE WITH ME, TEMPUS.



GOOT, SINCE TALK IS ALL I CAN MANAGE --



--CURSE DOT **ANDROID BODY.**



AND PRAISE THE LORD.

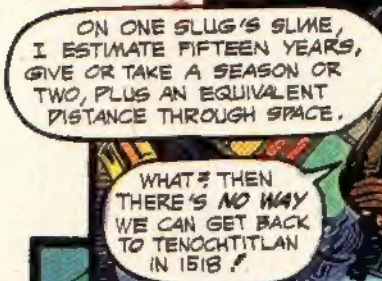
NOW WHAT DO I DO WITH THIS ICKY LUMP OF ICE?



JUST SCRAPE IT INTO THE TANK, MY ALLURING AVATRIX.

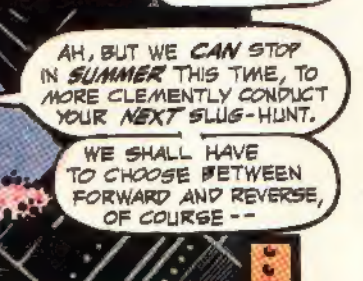


OKAY, HEAD, BUT HOW FAR CAN WE GO ON IT ANYWAY?



ON ONE SLUG'S SLIME, I ESTIMATE FIFTEEN YEARS, GIVE OR TAKE A SEASON OR TWO, PLUS AN EQUIVALENT DISTANCE THROUGH SPACE.

WHAT? THEN THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN GET BACK TO TENOCHTITLAN IN 1518?



AH, BUT WE CAN STOP IN **SUMMER** THIS TIME, TO MORE CLEMENTLY CONDUCT YOUR NEXT SLUG-HUNT.

WE SHALL HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN FORWARD AND REVERSE, OF COURSE --



--DER SWINGING SIXTIES OR SOMEWHEN CLOSER TO YOUR OWN NATIVE MILIEU, CIRCA 1940...

INDEED--NOW, SHALL WE CONDUCT OUR COLLOQUY IN THE MORE ACCOMMODATING ANACHRONY PEN OF INFINITY?



JUST AS LONG AS IT'S AWAY FROM KANSAS CITY IN THE WINTER OF '55.



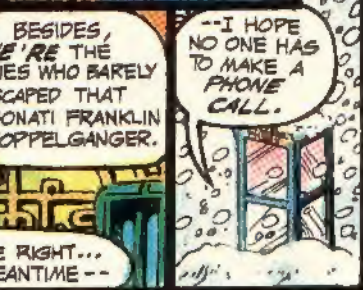
OKAY, BUT I'M GETTING WORRIED ABOUT ACE.

LEAVE THE WORRYING TO HIM--HE'S HAD MORE PRACTICE AT IT.



BESIDES, WE'RE THE ONES WHO BARELY ESCAPED THAT EBONATI FRANKLIN DOPPELGANGER.

MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT... BUT IN THE MEANTIME --



--I HOPE NO ONE HAS TO MAKE A PHONE CALL.

THE MELD-MEND

I'D FLED INTO THE GOLDEN MELD FOR THREE SUBJECTIVE MONTHS OF WOUND-LICKING, AT FIRST FEELING STRONG ENOUGH TO DO NOTHING MORE THAN EAT AND EVEN THAT ONLY ON BEEER WISE POWER.

THERE WAS A DAY WHEN I ALMOST DIED, SUDDENLY AWASH IN BLEAK IMAGES...
A BABY'S RATTLE IN AN OTHERWISE EMPTY CRIB.

A DESERTED TRAIN PLATFORM AT SNOW-MUFFLED MIDNIGHT.

A DEAD CLOCK AGAINST FLORAL WALLPAPER LEACHED OF ALL COLOR. A COOLING BED WITH A SINGLE GRAY HAIR LIMP AND LIFELESS ON THE PILLOW. AN EMPTY ROCKING CHAIR FROZEN IN TIME AND SPACE. AN INTERMINABLE CORRIDOR OF BARE WALLS AT WHOSE FAR END A SINGLE DOOR STOOD SLIGHTLY AJAR...

NO SOUND ACCOMPANIED THE SUCCESSION OF SLOWLY DISSOLVING TABLEAUX; EACH IMAGE WAS AS SILENT AS A FADED DAGUERRETYPE, AS STILL AS A DISEASED HEART BETWEEN WEARY BEATS.



BY THE END OF THE SECOND MONTH I FELT GOOD ENOUGH TO LOOK PRESENTABLE AT DINNER--

DURING THE LAST MONTH I ADDED EXERCISE AND PLAYED CHESS WITH MY ENEMIES' PURLOINED COMPUTER, TAKING VAST RELISH IN EACH MATCH WON AND PROGRAMMING VICIOUS GIBBERISH INTO THE MASTER CHIP UPON EACH OF ITS VICTORIES.

I ALSO PLUMBED BEYOND THE COMPUTER'S GAME PROGRAMS (WHICH GAVE ME A LOT TO DECIPHER), AND MANAGED TO BANISH ALL THOUGHTS OF KROK'S WIFE SHAKREEN, DEVOTING THOSE SYNAPSES TO BRIDGET AND THE PONDERED PROBABILITIES OF HER FATE.

...ONLY TO FIND QUANN INSTEAD --THE EBONATI FRANKLIN TWIN.

EVER SINCE, I'D BEEN HOPING BRIDGET HAD FLED TO HEAD--

I WONDERED IF THEY'D EVER RETURN TO TENOCHTITLAN.

IT WAS A BAD SIGN THAT THEY ALREADY HADN'T--TO HELP ME AGAINST QUANN-- UNLESS HEAD WAS PLAYING IT CAGY, DECIDING TO RETURN AN HOUR OR EVEN A DAY AFTER THEIR FLIGHT FROM THE PHONY FRANKLIN.

A PARADOX: THE BEST POSSIBILITY WAS IN MANY WAYS THE WORST.

IF THEIR LIVES DEPENDED ON ME-- IF THEY WERE TIME-STRANDED AND WAITING FOR ME-- WHERE AND WHEN AND HOW WOULD I FIND THEM?

...AND AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED, BEN FRANKLIN COULD GO FLY A KITE.

I USED THE SCRAM-BACK TO GIVE MYSELF AN ENTIRE BODY MASSAGE--

--USING MY SCRAM-BACK BOTH TO SHAVE MY PIRATE BEARD AND TO WARM THE EBONATI PROVISIONS.

I REMEMBERED GOING INTO MY AZTEC PYRAMID, ASSUMING I WOULD AGAIN CATCH HER IN THE BATH...

--AND THAT THE TWO OF THEM HAD ESCAPED TO ELSE--WHEN.

IF THEY WEREN'T BACK IN A WEEK, IT WOULD MEAN THEY'D MET THE JACKAL... OR WERE BEING HELD IN KROK'S FIVE-WORLDS LIMBO--OR, AT BEST, THAT THEY COULDN'T COME BACK UNTIL I DID SOMETHING TO HELP THEM COME BACK.

I DECIDED THAT MY LATEST VICTORY OVER THE EBONATI WAS NOT WORTH THE SAVORING --THAT THE LOSS OF ONE WOMAN HAD SUDDENLY MADE THE SALVATION OF HISTORY INSIGNIFICANT...

--STIMULATING MORE BLOOD TO THE HEALING WOUNDS...

OUT-TIME 2: SCRAMBACK YOUR LOVE TO ME

SO WHAT'S THE SCOOP ON ACE'S WRISTWATCH DOO-HICKEY?

HE USED THE COCKAMAMIE THING TO PUNCH THESE TUNES WITHOUT MOVING FROM THAT COUCH OVER THERE--AND THIS "RUNAROUND SUB" IS REALLY STARTIN' TO GROW ON ME...

IT'S ABOUT A GIRL THAT I ONCE KNEW...

IT CHARGES ITSELF BY ATTRACTING VARIOUS ENERGIES...

--THEN CONVERTS THE CHARGE TO USEFUL FUNCTIONS GOVERNED BY ACE'S WILL AND A FEW TINY BUTTONS ON THE DEVICE ITSELF.

WHAT KINDS OF ENERGIES, HEAD?

WITH THE SOLE EXCEPTION OF RAW LIGHTNING, MY FLOWERPETAL, VIRTUALLY ALL OF THEM...

SOLAR, MAGNETIC, GEOTHERMAL...

...LUNAR GRAVITATIONAL, CHLOROPLASMIC, PHOTOSYNTHETIC, COSMIC RAYS, MELD EFFLUVIUM, THE ENERGY OF THE MIND CALLED ESP, EVEN THE ENERGY BYPRODUCT OF TIME'S VERY PASSAGE.

WHOOO...

DO NOT MISCONSTRUE, LIEBCHEN--IT IS HARDLY A MAGIC WAND.

ITS TOTAL POWER IS A MERE TRANSLATION OF ITS USER'S OWN STRENGTH--SERVING TO LIFT A MAN-HOLE COVER, FOR INSTANCE, BUT NOT A HOUSE.

IT CAN OPEN DOORS AND BOTTLE-CAPS, SHINE SHOES AND BRUSH HAIR, WIND A CLOCK AND TAKE OUT THE TRASH--BUT THERE IS A CATCH...

ACH, BARBARIAN DISSONANCE--BUT SINCE DER MACHINE IS HARDLY STOCKED WITH THE VIENNA WALTZ, MY SAVAGE BREASTS, THEN PLAY ON.

HERE'S MY STORY, IT'S SAD BUT TRUE...

AS FOR THE "WRISTWATCH DOO-HICKEY" ACE'S SCRAMBACK IS FUNDAMENTALLY MODELED ON THE LIGHTNING ROD, ALTHOUGH GOING FRANKLIN ONE BETTER.

ACE MUST BE ABLE TO SEE WHATEVER HE WILLS THE SCRAMBACK TO DO--MEANING IT CANNOT OPEN A DOOR AROUND A CORNER OUT OF ACE'S SIGHT.

NORMALLY HE DOESN'T BOTHER--BUT THE SCRAMBACK DOES COME IN HANDY IF IT'S NECESSARY TO UNLOAD A TRUCK OR--

BUT HOW DOES IT DO IT?

VELL... I'M SHAKY ON THE STATUS OF OCCULT RESEARCH IN YOUR NATIVE 1840, BUT HAVE YOU HEARD OF "GHOSTS" EXPLAINED AS MANIFESTATIONS OF PSYCHIC ENERGY?

THE POOR BUBBIE, COULD IT IRON A SKIRT AND DO THE DISHES?

MM-- PROVIDED ACE PERFORMED THE TASK IN HIS MIND.

YEAH, I GUESS SO.

THEN...WHEN DER SCRAMBACK PUNCHES JUKEBOX TUNES OR FETCHES A COKE--

--THINK OF IT AS ACE SENDING HIS GHOST ON AN ERRAND.

SHEESH--YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO GIVE A PAME THE WILLIES, HEAD.

NOW...THAT WHICH EARNS THE SCRAMBACK ITS NAME DOES MAKE IT A MAGIC WAND.

WHEN ACE PIERCES A FOREIGN TIME, HE DOES THINGS WITHOUT OCCURRENCE IN TRUE HISTORY...

...AND THOSE WHICH INDEED PREVENT REPERCUSSIONS CREATED BY THE EBONATI'S MORE FLAGRANT PARADOXES--BRINGING US TO DOXIE-GLITCHES.

...IN ITSELF A PARADOX, SO HE CONFINES HIS ACTIONS TO THOSE WITH NEGLIGIBLE REPERCUSSIONS...

YOU SEE, THE SCRAMBACK'S NEGATION OF PARADOX DOES NOT INCLUDE THE PRODUCTS OF PARADOX.

GLITCHES ARE ANOTHER MATTER, SPAWNED BY SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF HISTORY, AND MUST BE NIPPED IN THE BUD OR DEALT WITH ON THEIR OWN TERMS.

AND THESE... "DOXIE-GLITCHES"...

THEY'RE WHAT THE EBONATI ARE TRYING TO CREATE--?

--BY MESSING UP HISTORY ALL THE TIME?

CORRECT--AND ENOUGH UNRESOLVED GLITCHES WOULD UNRAVEL THE VERY FABRIC OF TIME AND SPACE.

ANYWAY, AFTER ACE HAS DOCTORED A PARTICULAR TIME, THE SCRAMBACK NULLIFIES ALL TRACE OF HIS ERSTWHILE PRESENCE.

THE FACT THAT THE NORMAL TIME-STREAM WISHES TO REJECT THESE ALIEN TRACES PROBABLY ENABLES THE SCRAMBACK TO SUCCEED.

OF COURSE, IT CANNOT ERADICATE THE MEMORY OF ACE--MERELY ALL TANGIBLE EVIDENCE.

LIKE WHEN I WENT BACK TO HIS PRIVATE DICK OFFICE ON OBEARY STREET--

--ONLY TO FIND AN EMPTY ROOM WITH "AZTEC GRAPHICS" STENCILED ON THE DOOR.

MM--ONE HOPES ACE HAS NOT DRIVEN TOO MANY PEOPLE MAD. THERE WAS A SIOUX CHIEFTAIN ONCE...

...WHO MUST HAVE THOUGHT HIS MANITOU A REAL VICIOUS BASTARD.

A CHOICE OF CAMELS

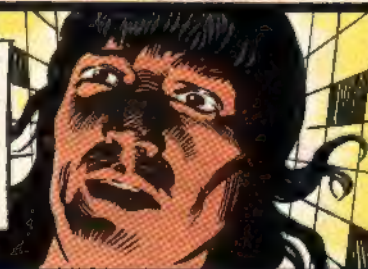
AND SO COMES THE GOLDEN DAY, AFTER A MELDED ETERNITY, WHEN DEATH'S SO RECENT DESIGN ON ME IS NOW BUT AN ETCHED SCAR, A NASTY HIEROGLYPH SIGNIFYING PAST PAIN ON THE STELE OF MY SKIN.



IN OTHER WORDS, AT FROZEN FIVE IN THE AFTERNOON, I LIVE...

...WONDERING IF THE SAME CAN BE SAID FOR BRIDGET AND HEAD...

...AS I NOW FACE A SERIOUS DECISION IN THE WAKE OF DIMINISHED PYGME, KNOWING THAT FRANKLIN'S KITE AND THE CIRCADIAN RHYTHM OF ALL THAT HAS LIVED AND DIED IS MORE THAN THE OBJECT OF AN EPITHET.



IT IS PARAMOUNT, INVOLABLE, SACROSANCT.

BUT... HOLDING THE KEY TO TIME AND SPACE IN THE CONTROLS OF THIS STOLEN EBONATI SHIFT-VEHICLE --



-- I KNOW THAT TIME IS BOTH OF CRUCIAL ESSENCE AND NONESSENTIAL TO ANY DECISION.

DO I ACT ON WHAT I'VE GLEANED FROM THE EBONATI COMPUTER -- ?



--OR DO I SEARCH FOR THE WOMAN WHO, IF ONLY FOR ONE BITTER HOUR, ONCE RENDERED ALL OF TIME MEANINGLESS AND INSIGNIFICANT ?

I CAN ALWAYS "GO BACK" (OR "FORWARD") TO UNDERTAKE EITHER ENDEAVOR FIRST OR LAST BUT IN EFFECT SIMULTANEOUSLY.

SO TWO QUESTIONS: HOW DO I MAKE SUCH DECISIONS ?



AND HOW MUCH EFFECT WILL MY DECISION HAVE ?

ANSWER ONE: FRANKLY, I GUESS A LOT.



AND ANSWER TWO: FRANKLY, I GUESS A LOT.

PERHAPS BECAUSE I FEAR AN ENCOUNTER WITH BRIDGET'S SKULL BENEATH THE SKIN, AND THE GREETING OF HER LIPESS GRIN, I CHOOSE THE BUSINESS OF ANCIENT DEATH BEFORE THE HOPE OF FUTURE PLEASURE.



THE WORST POSSIBILITY WILL DRAPE MY MIND LIKE A DARK SHROUD DURING EVERYTHING I MUST DO WEST OF THE NILE...



... BUT AT LEAST THE DELAYED HOPE WILL BURN LIKE A SPARK UNDER THE SHROUD.

SINCE HEAD'S MIND IS NOT MINE TO PLUMB, I'LL NEED EXPERT AID BOTTLED IN OTHER FLESH -- SOMEONE FROM AN ERA ADVANCED ENOUGH THAT EXPERIENCE WILL ENABLE HIM TO DEAL WITH THE PROBABLE EVENTS INVOLVED --



-- BUT AN ERA PRIMITIVE ENOUGH THAT IGNORANCE WILL SERVE AS THE BLISS PREVENTING MIND-BLOW.

FINE-TUNING AT RANDOM, I DECIDE HE WILL BE FROM 1989, WELL AFTER THE TECHNOLOGY OF THE LASER, BUT LONG BEFORE MY 23RD CENTURY INVENTION OF TIME TRAVEL.



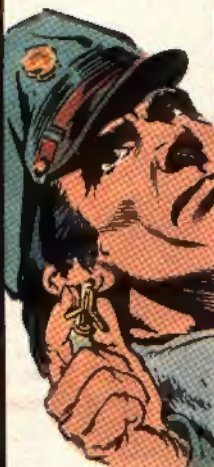
THE LOCALE IS AS PRECISE AS THE WOMB FACTOR WILL ALLOW: THE GIZA PLAIN, NEAR THE EGYPTIAN CITY OF MEMPHIS.

SINCE LANGUAGE CONFLICT IS THE LARGEST OBSTACLE TO TIME-SALVING --



-- I EXTRACT THE VOCABULIZER FROM ITS SCRAMBACK SLOT --

-- AND PLUG IT IN MY EAR.



IT WOULD TRANSLATE ANY LANGUAGE SPOKEN WITHIN ITS RANGE, ENABLING ME TO HEAR IT IN ENGLISH.

IT WOULD ALSO TRANSLATE MY SUBVOCALIZED REPLY, GIVING IT TO ME IN THE APPROPRIATE DIALECT: AN INTERNAL DIALOGUE COACH.



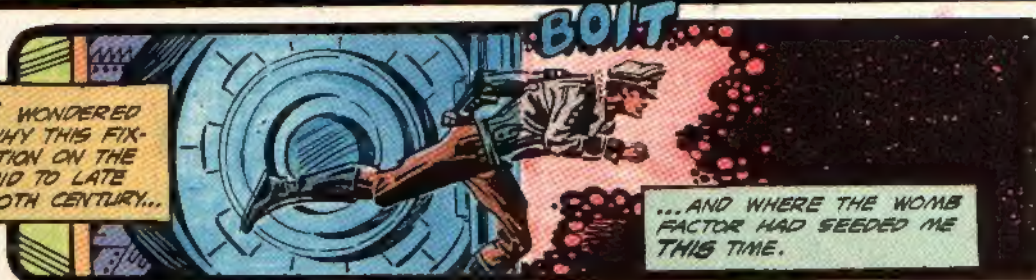
I ARRIVED.

AND THUS EQUIPPED AND NEUTRALLY ATTIRED, I LEFT MY LIMBO OF CONVALESCENCE.



FOR SOME MACABRE REASON, MY MIND WAS PLAYING THE JAUNTY THEME FROM "LEAVE IT TO BEAVER."

I WONDERED WHY THIS FIXATION ON THE MID TO LATE 20TH CENTURY...



... AND WHERE THE WOMB FACTOR HAD SEEDED ME THIS TIME.

NEITHER WALLY, LUMPY, NOR EDDIE HASKELL WAS ANYWHERE TO BE FOUND.



AND EVEN DISORIENTED, I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED...

ONE OF THE PYRAMIDS, AND...HUHN...
WHAT TUNING.

--THIRTY CENTURIES OF
PHARAONIC RULE, COVERING SOME
THIRTY DYNASTIES.

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS
BELIEVED THAT MAN, LIKE THE
SUN, WOULD DIE AND BE RE-
BORN IN A PERPETUAL CYCLE
OF REINCARNATION.

THAT IS WHY ALL
THE TEMPLES--MOSTLY
ERECTED TO WORSHIP THE
SUN GOD AMON-RA OR ATON,
AND WHICH WE SHALL VISIT
TOMORROW--ARE LOCATED
ON THE EAST BANK OF
THE NILE RIVER, WHERE
THE SUN IS REBORN
EACH MORNING...

...AND WHY
THESE PYRAMIDS,
AS WELL AS ALL THE
OTHER TOMBS ALONG
THE NILE, ARE LOCATED
ON THE WEST BANK--
WHERE THE SUN
DIES EACH
EVENING.

GIVEN THIS BELIEF, WE CAN UNDER-
STAND WHY THE TOMBS WERE SO
ELABORATELY PREPARED WITH PRO-
VISIONS, PROTECTIONS, AND DIVERSIONS--
ALL FOR THE LONG JOURNEYS
BETWEEN EACH INCARNATION.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE
PYRAMIDS THEMSELVES WAS
DESIGNED TO BE A STAIRWAY
TO HEAVEN--

--AND THEIR SHAPE
WAS REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE SUN AS A POINT ON
HIGH, SPREADING ITS RAYS
IN A "CONE" TO THE GROUND
BELOW, GIVING LIFE...EVEN
TO THE DEAD.

SO THE 1989 HE WOULD BE A SHE
WHO LOOKED NOTHING LIKE BRIDGET
BUT WHO WAS EXACTLY LIKE HER,
REMINING ME OF NO ONE AND NOTHING
ELSE; I ALMOST ABANDONED HER TO
SEARCH FOR AID ELSEWHERE, BUT IT'S
FUNNY HOW TIME TRICKS ITS TICKS...

...AND I
DECIDED IT
MIGHT BE AN
OMEN.

THE LARGEST MONUMENT
EVER BUILT, AS WELL AS THE
ONLY SURVIVING REMNANT OF THE
ORIGINAL SEVEN WONDERS OF
THE WORLD, IT CONTAINS AND
EMBODIES THE GREATEST
MYSTERY OF ANTIQUITY...

THE GREAT
PYRAMID OF
CHEOPS--OR
KHUFU, AS THE
PHARAOH WAS
ALSO KNOWN--
IS COMPRISED OF
2,300,000 LIME-
STONE BLOCKS,
EACH WEIGHING
BETWEEN TWO
AND THREE
TONS.

AFTER ALL
THAT EFFORT, ALL
THAT PLANNING, TO
ERECT THE WORLD'S
MOST MAGNIFICENT
TOMB...THE PHARAOH
WAS NEVER EVEN
INTERRED HERE.

WITHOUT
WHEEL OR
HORSE, ITS
CONSTRUCTION
REQUIRED THE
LABORS OF
100,000 MEN
FOR TWENTY
YEARS.

NO ONE KNOWS
WHY...AND HIS
REMAINS HAVE
NEVER BEEN
FOUND.

LIKE THE MISTRESS OF TIME'S MYSTERY
HERSELF, SHE WAS ALMOST TOO ETHEREAL
TO BE REAL, AND FAR MORE THAN I HAD
HOPED FOR...

NOW--IF
YOU'D CARE
TO LOOK
AROUND,
WE'LL MEET
BACK HERE
IN THIRTY
MINUTES.

YOU
OBVIOUSLY LOVE
YOUR WORK, MISS
RAMAN... AND
YOU OBVIOUSLY
LOVE THESE SAD
RUINS.

IT'S EVIDENT IN
YOUR EVERY WORD...IN
YOUR EYES...AND I'LL
BET YOU WISH THERE WAS
SOME WAY YOU COULD
GO BACK--TO WHEN
ALL OF THIS WAS NEW
IN ITS GLORY...

... AND WHEN THE ANSWER TO EVERY MYSTERY WAS FRESH AND PLAIN TO SEE.

ALONE, SHE SIGHS.

YES... I DO WISH I COULD GO BACK THERE..

WANT A RIDE?

WH - WHO--?

RELAX...

... AND LET ME TAKE YOU DOWN...

... TO ANTIQUITY.

OUT-TIME 3: THE SOUVENIR HALL OF PAST & FUTURE ANTIQUITY

YOU KNOW, MY COMELY CARAFE, THERE'S A STORY BEHIND EVERY ONE OF THESE SOUVENIRS...

AND THE WHOLE HALL, HEAD, IS LIKE A GLORIFIED ANTIQUE SHOP...

BUT THIS MODERNISTIC JAZZ IS COMMON EVERYDAY STUFF TO ME.

NOSTALGIA IS ETERNALLY RELATIVE, BRIDGET, EVER A PRODUCT OF MISPLACED TIME

...PROVING ACE AND I MUST HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON, SEEING I USED TO RUN AN ANTIQUE SHOP IN 1940.

I GUESS SO--

--IF SOMETHING LIKE THIS IS ANTIQUE TO YOU AND ACE... WHEN I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT IT IS.

YOU WILL, MY SALUBRIOUS SERAPHIM... YOU WILL.

UNSTUCK IN MEMPHIS
WITH THE GO-BILE
BLUES AGAIN

I'D USED SCRAMBACK ENERGY AS
A SHORTCUT TO HYPNOSIS, LEARNING
THAT SHE WAS AIDA RAMAN, AN
ARCHAEOLOGY STUDENT EARNING
HER TUITION AS A TOUR GUIDE...

...AND WHEN SHE WAS IN A DEEP
BUT FULLY ALERT TRANCE, I CUT
IT OFF, FEEDING HER THE
NECESSARY LIE...

--A DREAM, AIDA.

A BEAUTIFUL
AND EXCITING
DREAM.

A DREAM OF
THE PAST...OF
THE ANCIENT
EVENINGS?

YES.

AND IT WILL
ALL SEEM VERY
REAL TO YOU.

YOU DO WISH
TO EMBARK ON
SUCH A DREAM,
DON'T YOU?

MORE
THAN ANY
THING,
CAZA--MY
PASSION
FEEDS
ON THE
PAST.

GOOD--
ALL I ASK
IN RETURN
IS YOUR KNOW-
LEDGE.

NOW TAKE THIS,
AND THE DREAM
WILL BEGIN TO
UNFOLD...

IT IS ACTUALLY A
23RD CENTURY ANTI-
EMETIC--TO REDUCE
THE DISORIENTING
EFFECTS OF MELD-
SHIFT--THE "GO-
BILE" TIMESICKNESS.

WE ENTER
DARKNESS
EONS OLD--

-- EMERGING INTO
LIGHT AS YET UN-
CREATED.

A STRANGE
DREAM...WHICH
DOES NOT SEEM
LIKE THE PAST
AT ALL...

JH, THE DREAM HASN'T STARTED
YET, AIDA-- FIRST I'VE GOT TO PLAY
MORPHEUS AND CAST THE SLEEP-
NETS.

IN TRUTH, I MUST DOUBLE-
CHECK WHAT I'D STUMBLERD
UPON IN MY SEMI-DELIRIOUS
CHESS MATCHES...

YEP--THE INFO STORED IN THE EBONATI COMPUTER WAS NATURALLY INTENDED FOR THOSE ALREADY IN THE KNOW...



...SO IT DIDN'T SPELL OUT EVERYTHING...

...BUT I DEDUCED ENOUGH TO KNOW THE EBONATI PLANNED A TIME-RAID ON CHEOPS' MILIEU, THE FOURTH DYNASTY, AND APPARENTLY PINPOINTING THE OLD BOY'S DEATH...



WHEN DID CHEOPS DIE, AIDA?

2523 B.C.

BINGO--JUST WHAT THE COMPUTER LISTED, AND JUST WHAT I PROGRAMMED AS OUR DESTINATION IN THE LAND OF NOD...



...ALTHOUGH I DID TIME OUR ARRIVAL FOR A FEW HOURS AFTER THE ARRIVAL POINT OF THE EBONATI RAIDERS.

HAD I BEEN ABLE TO ADDUCE THEIR PLANS, I MIGHT HAVE VREBBED TO FIVE MINUTES PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL--FOR A PRE-EMPTIVE AMBUSH-POUNCE AS SOON AS THEY EMERGED FROM THE MIELD...



GAZA...I THINK...

I THINK IT IS BECOMING A DREAM.



BUT SINCE I DIDN'T KNOW HOW MANY DARK BOYS THERE'D BE, THE DETAILS OF THEIR OBJECTIVE, AND WHETHER IT MIGHT WEAVE INTO THE TAPESTRY OF A LARGER SCHEME--

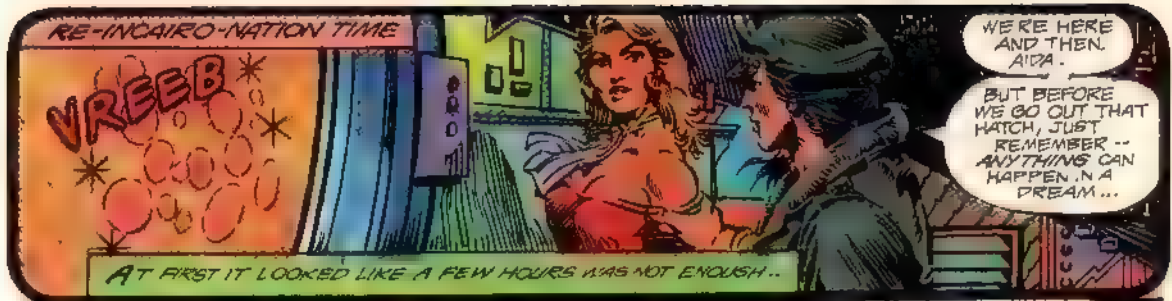
--THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE A MISSION OF THE SNOOP-AND-STRIKE-WHEN-READY VARIETY.



IS THIS PAYMENT ENOUGH FOR ALL THE YEARS?

NOTHING COULD BE PAYMENT ENOUGH.

BUT THIS WILL DO.



RE-INCAIRO-NATION TIME

VREEB

WE'RE HERE AND THEN, AIDA.

BUT BEFORE WE GO OUT THAT HATCH, JUST REMEMBER -- ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN A DREAM...

AT FIRST IT LOOKED LIKE A FEW HOURS WAS NOT ENOUGH...



... BUT THEN MY EARPIECE VOCABULATOR TRANSLATED:

SO MANY YEARS--BUILDING THIS TOMB...FILLING IT WITH TREASURE...

AYE-- AND ONLY ONE NIGHT IN WHICH TO CLAIM OUR PAYMENT.

BESIDES, THE ERO-NATI COMPUTER WAS CRAMMED WITH GIBBERISH ABOUT THE EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD--

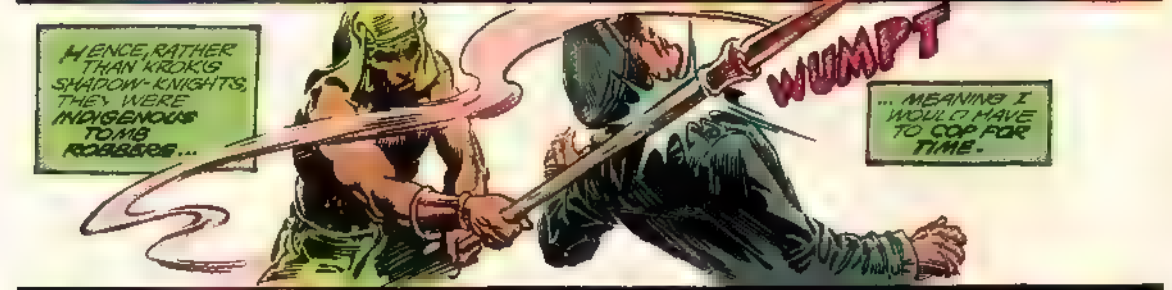
FREEZE THIEVES!

A DREAM?



-- AND THESE TWO BIRDS WERE DEFINITELY AFTER A HEAVIER LOOT.

CHUD



HENCE, RATHER THAN KROK'S SHADOW-KNIGHTS, THEY WERE INDIGENOUS TOMB ROBBERS...

WUMPT

... MEANING I WOULD HAVE TO COP FOR TIME.



AH, WELL.

HWOK

I'D COME WITHOUT INVITATION

AND NOBODY EVER SAID CRASHING ETERNITY'S GATES WOULD BE EASY.

TUT-TUT, DON'T
BUST A GUT

OUR SURROUNDINGS HAD
APPARENTLY STUNNED MY
89 GUIDE INTO IMMOBILITY...

EITHER THAT, OR SHE WAS
FANATICALLY NONVIOLENT
IN ANY ERA-- BECAUSE SHE
HARDLY LEAPED INTO THE
PHARAONIC PRAY...

SHUDD

COULD'VE
USED HER
HELP
TOO.

FRACK

TRUE, THEY
WERE OLD
ENOUGH
TO BE MY
ANTEDEILUVIAN
ANCESTORS,
BUT THEY
WERE
HARDLY
ARTHRITIC...

THRACK

...AND THEY WERE
TWO AGAINST
ONE.

RUMPF

THEN
AGAIN,
ACE
BEATS
DEUCE
EVERY
TIME-

--NO MATTER HOW
WILD IT GETS.

YOU BREAK
IT, YOU
BUY IT.

KERATCH

THEY BOUGHT
IT--FOR
COUNTS OF
TEN...

AIDA--?



AND MORE
LIKE HOURS
THAN
SECONDS.

IT'S...ALL
HERE...



THE EARLIER
SHIFT-LEHYLE
HAD PROBABLY NOBIL-
FACTURED TO ONE
OF THE TUNNELS OR
LARGER CHESTS, THE
EPOCHAL NO DOUBT
LONG GONE BY
NOW.

THE CANOPIC JARS
FOR HIS VISCERA--
PROTECTED BY
THE FOUR
SONS OF
HORUS AND--

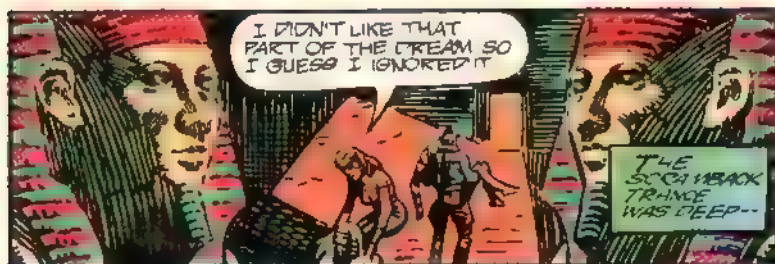


NEVER MIND
THAT AIDA.

JUST GIVE
ME A HAND
WITH THE OTHER
LOUT, WILL
YOU?

OH.

OF..OF
COURSE,
CAZA.



I DIDN'T LIKE THAT
PART OF THE DREAM SO
I GUESS I IGNORED IT

THE
SO-CALLED
TRINCE
WAS DEEP--

-- BUT HOW MUCH COULD SHE TAKE BEFORE DOUBTING..?

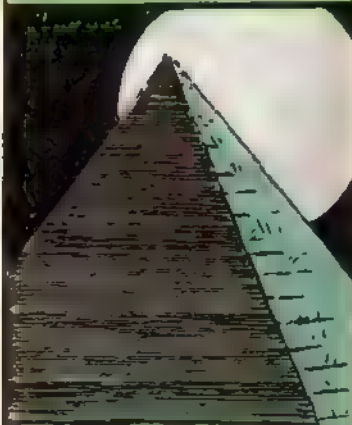


THIS "LOUT"
IS HEAVY,
CAZA--AND
HE SHELLS
VERY REAL.

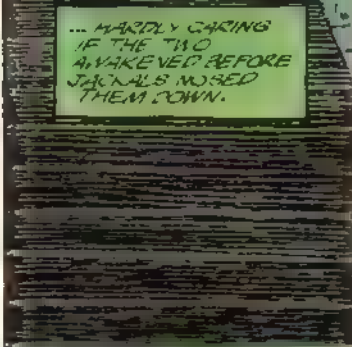
APPARENTLY NOT MUCH.

A GOOD
DREAM, AIDA, IS
ALWAYS EDGED
WITH THE WEIGHT
OF REALITY.

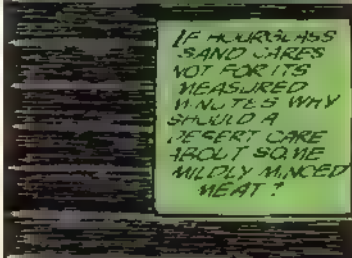
WE DRAGGED THE THIBS TO
THE WEST OF AIDINE A
QUARTER-MILE DISTANT,
WHERE ETERNITY'S SHIFTING
SAND WOULD SHIFT ETERNALLY.



... HARDLY CARING
IF THE TWO
AWAKENED BEFORE
JACKALS MOVED
THEM DOWN.



IF A JACKAL'S
SAND CARES
NOT FOR ITS
MEASURED
MINUTES WHY
SHOULD A
DESERT CAKE
ABOUT SOME
WILDLY MINCED
MEAT?



BESIDES SOME WOULD SAY
THAT GRAVE-ROBBERS
BEHAVE FAR WORSE THAN
A VERE BITE ON THE JARS.



ATOP THE DUNE, AIDA WAS IMMERSIFIED BY A SPELL STRONGER THAN MY SOONBACK COULD SUMMON HER. SHE STARRED TO DANCING WITCHLOCKE BY THE SORCERY OF A STRANGE AND SENSUAL NIGHT SO LONG AGO, MY FEELS WERE...

AND AS SHE CAME BACK AT THE MOON, I SCARVED MY HEAD AND HANDS QUITE SINCERELY. NO, MY MIND...

THE COMPUTER CONTINUED ALL THAT CRYPTIC BOKELEDYBOOK ABOUT THE BOOK OF THE DEAD SO IT HAD TO BE THE MAGGUFFIN... BUT WHAT OF THE MAGGUFFIN?

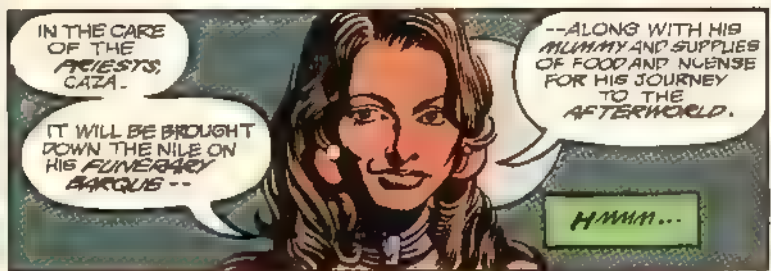
WAIT A MINUTE, IF I'D GIVEN HER THE TICKET TO RIDE THIS DREAM, IT WAS TIME FOR SOME RECOMPENSE...



SO RIDDLE WE THINK, AIDA:

IF CHEOPS HAS JUST DIED--

--WHERE WOULD HIS BOOK OF THE DEAD BE?

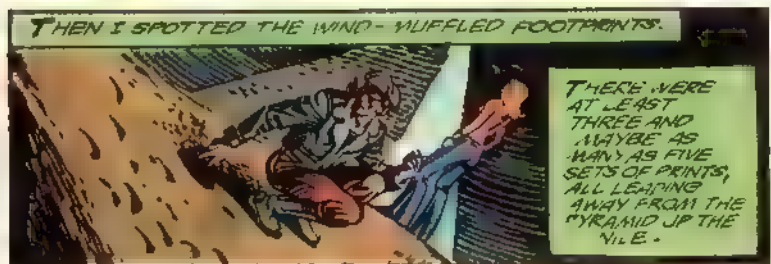


IN THE CARE OF THE PRIESTS, CAZA-

IT WILL BE BROUGHT DOWN THE NILE ON HIS FUNERARY BARQUE --

--ALONG WITH HIS MUMMY AND SUPPLIES OF FOOD AND NCENSE FOR HIS JOURNEY TO THE AFTERWORLD.

HMMMM...



THEN I SPOTTED THE WIND-MUFFLED FOOTPRINTS.

THERE WERE AT LEAST THREE AND MAYBE AS MANY AS FIVE SETS OF PRINTS, ALL LEADING AWAY FROM THE PYRAMID UP THE NILE.



AIDA, WHAT'S UP THAT WAY?

CHEOPS' PALACE.

AND WHERE DID CHEOPS DIE?

IN HIS PALACE.



WAIT THERE! WE'VE GOT TO SET TO THE PALACE FAST, BUT NOT TO WORRY-- I'M AN OLD CAMEL THIEF FROM WAY BACK.

ACTUALLY, I'M AHEAD BUT MY SPILL HERE...

BUT THERE ARE NO CAMELS AROUND HERE -- NOT IN THIS PERIOD.



I HAVE MY WAYS--AND BESIDES, YOU'RE DREAMING, REMEMBER?

SO I WENT BACK TO BUY SOME CAMELS WHEN THEY WERE CHEAPEST--

--HOPING THE SARCOPHAGUS IDOLS BUSTED BUT HADN'T DAMAGED THE SHIFT-VEHICLE'S MATCH.

OUT-TIME 4:
FACTORS
THE WOMB

SO WHY ARE
WE IN A PHONE
BOOTH?

PERHAPS NOT
SURPRISINGLY I
CALL THE
WOMB
FACTOR--

WHY DOES THE AZURE
CROSSTIME EXPRESS ALWAYS VIBES
OUT OF THE GOLDEN MIELD INTO
A SEWER OR LADIES ROOM OR
SOME OTHER CONTAINED
SPACE?



--AND I MAINTAIN,
FURTHERMORE, THAT
IT SOMEHOW AND
SUBCONSCIOUSLY
ACCOUNTS FOR THE
DESIGN OF THE A.C.E.
BEING AN EGG.

BUT WHATEVER ONE CALLS IT,
I SUSPECT IT IS THE GUIDING
ENERGY OF THE NATURAL ORDER
-- THE WILLPOWER OF TIME.

BETTER RUN
THAT ONE PAST ME
AGAIN, HONEY.

TIME ABHORS PARADOX.
T'VE CANNOT ASIDE
PARADOX EVERY TRIP THE
A.C.E. MAKES IS A VIOLATION
OF TIME, A SLAP IN THE FACE
OF THE NATURAL ORDER--
AND A FOUNDATION
FOR PARADOX.

ERGO THE CONSCIENCE
OF TIME SEEKING TO
PROTECT ALL PARADOXICALLY
HIDES THE PARADOX-MAKER
IN THE NEAREST WOMBLIKE
CONCEALED PLACE.

'WELL I GUESS
THERE ARE
WORSE THINGS
THAN HAVING AN
A.C.E. IN THE
H.O.P.--AND THAT
BUT'S A VICE
LIKENESS,
SUGG.'

THANK YOU, MY
FLOWERBELLE, BUT THE
NAME IS TEMPOUS FUST--
OR HEAD, IF YOU MUST.

AND NOW...
CARE TO SEE ACE'S
CLOCK
COLLECTION?



NOT IF THE
SLIME'S
THAWED.



I'D TREKKED A MILLENIUM FOR TWO CAMELS

BUT FOR NOW IT WAS ONLY A TWINKLING. ONE MOMENT I ENTERED THE PYRAMID AND THE NEXT MOMENT I'D EMERGED WITH TWO GREAT STANDING BEASTS...

--EVEN THOUGH THE HAGGLING IN CAIRO'S 18TH CENTURY MARKET PLACE HAD CONSUMED IRRITATING HOURS



ANYWAY OUR BOTTOMS MERCILESSLY HUMPHED WE WERE ON OUR WAY...

AND I NOTED AT A DARK PLOTTER CLIP THAN THE BROWNTI HAD ALIGNED THEMSELVES BY THEIR



AS THE WE'D DRIFT BEAT THEM TO THE PLACE

BUT AFTER LESS THAN A LORRYING HOUR...



AIDA --WHAT'S THAT COMING DOWN THE RIVER TOWARD US?

IT... YES! IT MUST BE CAZA!

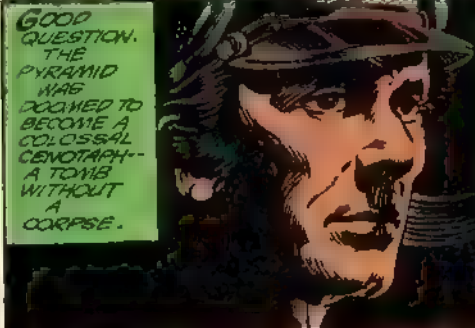
SHE WAS THRILLED AS ONLY A TIME-TRAVELED WOULD-BE ARCHEOLOGIST COULD BE THRILLED...

IT'S CHEOPS' FUNERARY BARQUE-- COMING TO HIS TOMB-- TO THE GREAT PYRAMID!

SHE FROWNED.

BUT THEN...WHY WASH T HE INTERRED THERE?

GOOD QUESTION. THE PYRAMID WAS DOOMED TO BECOME A COLLOSAL CEVOTAPH-- A TOMB WITHOUT A CORPSE.



STANDING EMPTY THROUGH THE AGES, IT WOULD TESTIFY TO THE MORTUARY TRADES BIGGEST SNAFU--A GIGANTIC CON-SPIRACIOUS WHITE ELEPHANT OF DEATH.

I HAD A FEELING WE'D SOON FIND OUT.

COME ON AIDA-- WE'VE GOT TO GET RID OF THESE GALUMPHING HUMPHERS AND HIDE BEFORE THAT PROCESSION GETS HERE.

HIDE WHERE?



DON'T WORRY--I GUARANTEE DEATH-SIDE SEATS.

**THE WOMB
FACTORY:**

EMERGE MY
NIGHTGAUNTS--
EMERGE FROM THE
FORGE OF THE
FIERY WOMB--
EMERGE IN THE
RAW, DARK
FORMS OF
DEATH!

AMONG FIRST
YOUR PURPOSE--
TO RECEIVE THE
GREATER HEAT OF
LIFE!

**NINE-DROK'S
LAB**

LET MY DARKROD
CANNON SHAPE YOUR
NEW IMAGES
CHIPPING AWAY
YOUR DARK
SHELLS--

CITY-SHIP:

-- SO THAT
LIFE MAY BE
SCULPTED
FROM THE VERY
HEART OF
DEATH.

LIQUID CORE:

AND SOON MY
NIGHTGAUNTS YOU
SHALL BECOME
THE AGENTS OF
THE GREAT
RAMESES' ETERNAL
FLAMMABILITY--

FIVE-WORLDS

--AS WELL
AS THE
SHAPER OF
CAZA'S
DEATH!

AND WHILE
YOUR FUTURE
HANGS IN NEGLECT,
MY CHILD, THE
LABORS ONLY TO
BRING LIFE TO
STILL MACHES
OF HIS
FLAMMABLE
CREATIONS--

--THEY WHO
ARE BORN IN
FEATHERS/ON AND
CONSIGED TO
FATAL FOLLY.

THERE WERE TWO NIGHTS,
MY CHILD, ONE FOLLOWING THE
OTHER, ONE DARK, ONE
MOONLIT.

AND IF THE
POSSIBILITIES LIE
BETWEEN CAZA
AND HIM...

...THEN I HOPE
WITH ALL THE
FERVOR OF ONE
HEART BEATING
FOR TWO...

...THAT YOU ARE
~~NOT~~ ANOTHER OF
HIS LIFE-CREATIONS,
SPAWNED IN THE
DARK.

ONE THING I KNOW
AND PROMISE:

REGARDLESS OF YOUR
SEED'S ORIGIN, YOU WILL
NEVER ~~BE~~ HIS.

BASKET-CASES IN THE BULLRUSHES

SO THE GREAT SEATS WERE SLIGHTLY WET--BUT WHAT DID SHE
EXPECT WHEN BULLRUSHES ARE THE ONLY COVER?

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.
CAZA--IT'S SO FAR FROM
DEAD AND DUSTY
RELIQS.

NO NEED TO GET SO ANTSY
ABOUT IT--JUST BECAUSE I
WAS QUAKING IN MY MID-
SACKED PANTS.

IT'S SO FRESH--
AND NEW!

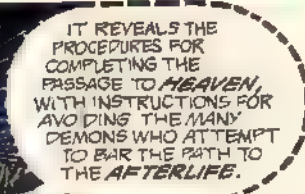
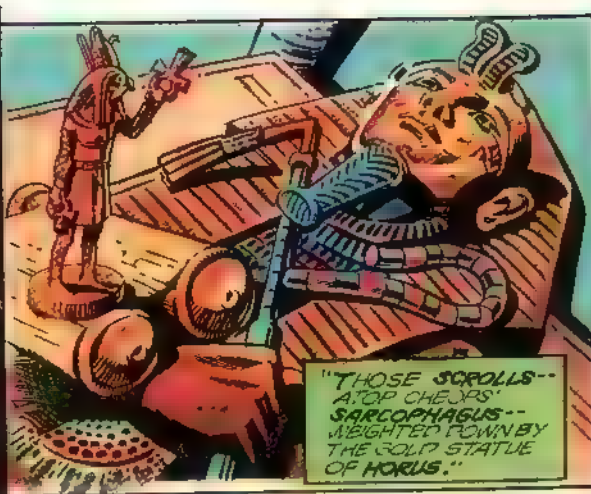
BUT MELO FORGIVE HER--AT LEAST HER
NERVOUSNESS IS BORN OF EXCITEMENT
AND ANTICIPATION.

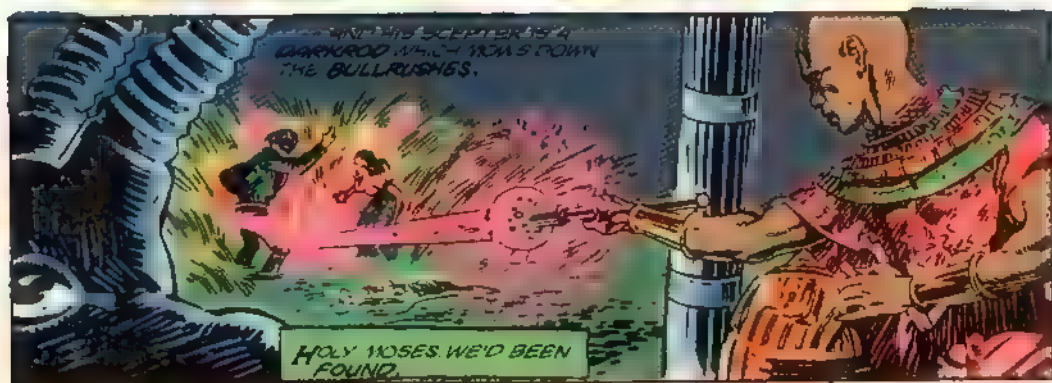
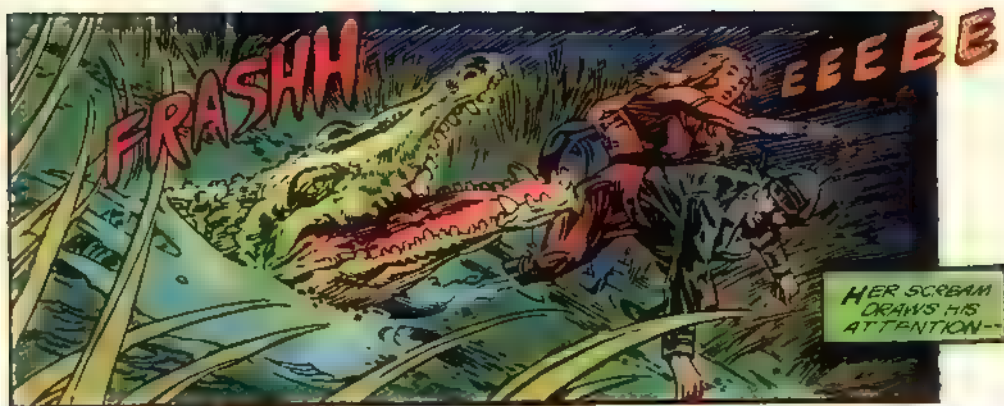
THE BARQUE FLOATS
MORE MAJESTICALLY
THAN I EVER
DREAMED--

--AND LOOK
AT THE NOBLE
PRIESTS--AND
THE WAILING
WOMEN--AMENTING
THEIR DEAD
PHARAOH.

I GAINED
ALL RIGHT,
BUT I HAD
A SENSE TO
BEHOLD

BUT I
STILL
DON'T
SEE
THE
FUTURE
FIN.





OUT - TIME 5: IN THE CHRONOMECH CHAMBER



WE'VE INVESTIGATED BRIDGET, AND YOUR ABSENCE FROM EVERY YEAR FOLLOWING 1940 IS TENABLE TO THE FABRIC OF TIME

BRIDGET YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW, DON'T NEED TO KNOW...

LISTEN TO ME! WHAT IF "IS A GAME WITHOUT MEANING" TO YOU?

YES, DAMN IT! EVENTS HAVE BEEN MIRACULOUSLY KIND TO YOU AND ACE!

YOU COULD HAVE BEEN GARGO OR EVITA PERONE HERSELF--

"--AND THEN WHAT WOULD
HAPPEN TO CAMILLE
AND ARGENTINA NOW?"



GO
BACK TO
YOUR
BOX
HEAD.

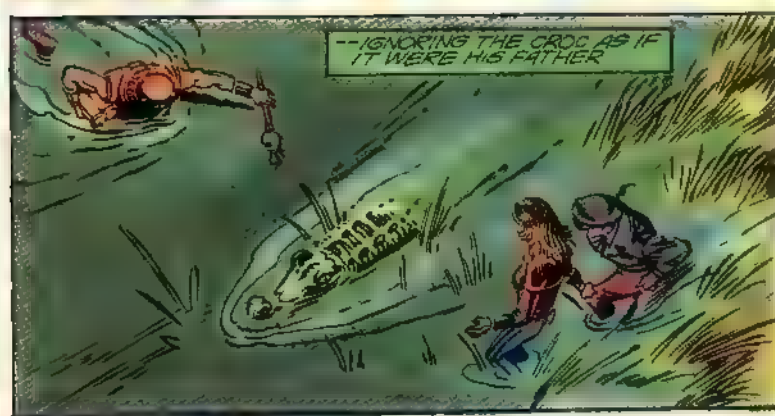
I
WANT
TO BE
ALONE.

THE DOXIE
EFFLUVIUM



WHAT
KIND OF
CRAZY
DREAM
IS
THIS?!

THE SHAVEN SON
OF MIDNIGHT
SNATCHED THE
SCROLL AND
DIVED FOR
THE NILE--



--IGNORING THE CROC AS IF
IT WERE HIS FATHER

IF ONLY CROCODILES
(AND NINE-CROCODILE,
FOR THAT MATTER)
COULD BE HYPNOTIZED...



TO HELL AND LIMBO WITH
IT! I MUST STOP THE
THEFT OF THE BOOK OF
THE DEAD, IF ONLY TO
LEARN WHY I MUST
STOP IT...



...AND EVEN IF I HAVE TO RISK
THE PARADOX OF PUTTING
A 20TH CENTURY BULLET
SQUARELY INTO THE FOREBRAIN
OF A CROC FROM 2523 B.C.

SHOOT,
CAZA--WHAT ARE YOU
WAITING FOR?!

THE CROCODILE'S
EYES BULGED
SURREALLY OUTWARD
MEANING THAT
SOMETHING WAS
TRYING TO TELL
THE CROD. WELL,
NOT A CROD
WAS ALL...

THE EYES
SNAPPED
ELASTICALLY
BACK IN PLACE.

THEN WINKING ONCE--

--THE LEFT ONE
WAS FRACTURED
BY A SAW FROM
WITHIN...

...AND I WATCHED
SPELLBOUND--
ALMOST
HYPNOTIZED--
AS A JAGGED
HOLE WAS
QUICKLY
CUT.

THE GELID
HATCH SWUNG
OPEN AND A
LEERING DOXIE-
GLITCH POPPED
OUT.

BUT NO
ORDINARY
GLITCH,
-E-

THIS WAS
A BORN
LEADER
DESPITE
HIS
SIZE...

CHAAARGE!!

...THE GENERAL
OF AN ARMY WHICH
HAD ONCE
TRASHED
EGYPT.

BUCKLE YOUR SEAT-
BELT, AIDA: YOU'RE
IN FOR A NEW KIND
OF RIDE.

THEY WERE BACK...
FORTY-THREE
CENTAURS BECAUSE
THEY'D KILLED
THE
FIRST ONE

...AND AS THEY SWARMED TOWARD MY FACE WITH THEIR MISTY
LITTLE FACES, I REMEMBERED WHAT THEY'D DONE TO THE SPINKE
NONE.

I THINK THIS
DREAM... JUST
BECAME A
NIGHTMARE!

AND SO WITH
REGRET FOR THE
MIST I'D SO PRESENTLY
PLUCKED FROM THE
WINDING ONLY TO PICK
HER AGAIN IN RETURN
FOR GRANTING A DREAM,
I FACED THE FACT
THAT WE WOULD
BOTH HARDLY DIE,
BECOMING THE FULL
CIRCLE...

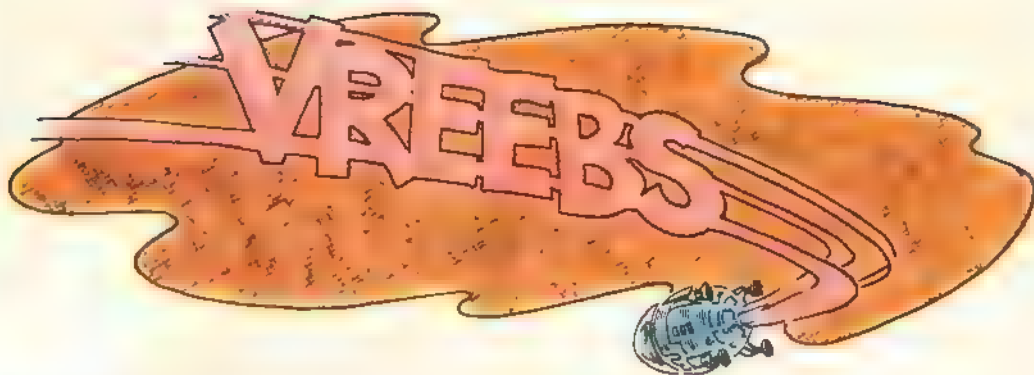
...AND I DESIGNED OF BEER
FULLFILLING MY OWN DREAM
FOR I WOULD NOW NEVER HAVE
THE CHANCE...

-- TO MURDER
BRIDGET
KRONOPOLLOUS

PLEASE, ACE,
WHEREVER YOU ARE...
DON'T DIE.

COME
AND GET
ME.

CONCLUDED NEXT
ISSUE IN:
**NECROPOLIS
NIGHTS**



Why "Vreeb's"? Well, we were going to call our lettercol something like "Azure Express Mail" or "Coptic Comments" or "Meld Musings" or "Timely Tidings" or "Dateline: Last Issue" or "c/o Head" or "Warped Comments" or "Page Twenty-Three" or "Wait a Minute, Mr. Postman" or "For Future Reference Now" or "Time-Delay Thought-Transference" or "Specific Delivery" or even "Disorientations" . . . but we finally settled on "Vreeb's" to save space and time.

O—okay. Having just read AZTEC ACE no. 1, I'm in shock. This is the most mindboggling stuff since Starlin's Warlock series. I recently (?) had a letter printed in Scorpio Rose, which was appended by a facetious retort from its writer, Steve Englehart. I meant to write back with some cute remarks and a diagram encompassing the results of my foray into the occult. I didn't. Now that I've read A.ACE, it is ironically more fitting that I reveal the diagram to you:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 2) $1+1=2$ | DUALISM (Christianity, Gnosticism) |
| 1) $1+(-1)=0$ | MONISM (Judaism, Krsnaism) |
| 0) $2=0$ | PARADOX (Kabbalahism, Zen, Confucianism) |
| -1) $2\neq0$ | PLEASURE PRINCIPLE (Atheism, Hedonism) |
| -2) $(2=0)=(2\neq0)$ | DOUBLE PARADOX (My theory) |
| -3) $(00=\emptyset)=(00\neq\emptyset)$ | TRIPLE NEGATIVE ("Ain Soph Aur"?) |

I devised this "Equation of Truth" about five years ago and have stood by it since. Now, I'm not so sure. I came up with a mere Double Paradox, while Mr. Moench has devised the Infinite Multiple Paradox. I'm agast.

Yet this is all just a grandiose way of saying that A.ACE has got to be the most inspiring comic I've ever read. The plot, dialogue, pace, interstices, breakdowns, composition, rendering, inking, coloring, attention to historic and stylistic detail are all — dare I say it? — Ace! Some readers may complain that A.ACE is too esoteric. Not this reader, not by a longshot! I love it!

Indeed, there's only one problem with AZTEC ACE, and it's the audience and therefore sales. This is heavyduty stuff, eclipsing even American Flag! I just hope there are enough enlightened souls out there to support you. If not, it will be a severe blow to comics' valiant quest for credibility as a "legitimate" artform. Just as Eisner, Lee, Kirby, and Steranko were ahead of their times, so are the creators of A.ACE, not to mention Zek himself. Let's hope that progressivity is synchronous with the present, if only for the nonce. Comics like this demand respect.

Steven Feldman
222 Douglas Avenue
Providence, RI 02908

And since we're trying to accord a full measure of

respect to our intended audience — you people, the ones who care enough about comics to seek them out — we'll gladly take all we can get in return, like so:

I've been reading comics — and loving them — for ten years now, and letter-hacking the last two, but every once in a while I hit a spell where they start to lose their hold on me. They start to seem repetitious (actually, they are repetitious, but I just started noticing it), schoolwork gets in the way, or I get involved in reading a great book, and I think, "Why am I wasting my time on The New Teen Ninjas or The Scarlet Scarab Does Dallas?" And even though I've been cutting back on my comics buying, I have to force myself to read one issue a day just so I don't lose any more ground on my comics stack. Yes, I'm in one of those ruts right now.

But even though my eyes are glassy and I'm just plain tired of even the cream of the current comics, AZTEC ACE got to me. It was the most exciting, interesting, intellectual, stimulating, outrageous, complex, fantastic, imaginative, and just plain fun comic I've read this month — hell, this year, and then some!

I tend to write gripy letters, so know that this one's from the heart. My God, I haven't enjoyed a new series so much since, I don't know, Howard the Duck, maybe? AZTEC ACE is an eccentric, wild joyride, and for this issue at least, I have no criticism. ACE sprang up suddenly like a flower in the desert, complete unto itself, and has such a (you'll pardon the expression) timeless quality: like "The Sun Sessions" or good doo-wop music, there's a mood, an aura surrounding it, a shadowy echo caressing it, taking some breathtaking performance that one feels is of such beauty it could never have been produced on this planet, sucking the time from around it and placing it before us — like so — and we feel somehow that it has always been there. Doug, you're in the business of bottling sunsets and distilling rainbows, but speaking as a guy who's read a lot (but not enough) Doug Moench stories, you've just produced your strangest and most wonderful dream yet. Thanks.

Oh, and before I go, I wholeheartedly approve of all the Ace's listening choices, but I can't help but wonder when his tastes will turn to an immensely-popular easy-listening rock band that rose to prominence in the mid-seventies that you (and me too, me too) are rather fond of. Until nicks time . . .

David Allen
Olney Central College
5 Douglas Drive
Olney, IL 62450

David, without meaning to sound coy, there's not too much I can say in response except to quote my pal B. Kronop. "Hooooo. . ."

After completing A.ACE no. 1, my buns were well and truly busted, Car's buns were busted, Nestor's buns were busted, Denis' and Adam's buns were busted — and

less than halfway through the story Michael Hernandez's burns just plain exploded. A letter like yours recovers the pieces

AZTEC ACE no. 1 . . . for some reason I picture this comic as having a soundtrack performed by The Grateful Dead (having given away my own Dead albums years ago I had to settle for Pat Metheny and Lyle Mays' "As Falls Wichita, So Falls Wichita Falls") . . . is, as Dr Johnny Fever would say, a deeply weird book

Of course, I enjoyed it immensely!

There are various reasons to read comic books (especially at my own advanced age of 28) . . . to be amused, to vicariously enjoy some make-believe violence, to be entertained. Most mainstream comics gleefully provide the violence and, occasionally, a little humour. Some are even relatively worthwhile entertainment for the few minutes it takes one to read them (" . . . look! it's Big Bad Man he's going to . . . this looks like a job for . . . your crime-wave is over, villain . . . oh, yeah? . . . yeah! . . . Pow! Zap! Crack! Whoosh! Crack! Zappo! . . . oh, Big Good Guy you saved . . . up, up, and . . .")

Comics that force you to pay attention are, sad to say, few and far between. Like *American Flagg!* AZTEC ACE makes you invest time and effort to the words as well as the pictures. The investment pays off handsomely to be sure

Like Bridget, I cannot pretend to understand everything going on here but what I do understand is fascinating and I'm willing to hang around until insights and/or explanations are forthcoming (heck, Ronin was two-thirds the way through its run before it started making sense)

"It all began four hundred years later . . ." I love that line . . . time paradoxes, a 23rd century humanitarian who lives in a pyramid in 1518 and loves Fritos, a floating head, an "antique" dealer from 1940, "Slug Slime," a script with a lot of words that doesn't seem too wordy, a bunch of guys who look like the "new" Spider-Man (without the white spider), beautiful art, a "Maltese Snake" . . . deeply weird indeed

To be sure, it's going to be a "long, strange trip" but count me in. I'm hooked already!

Michael K Willis
10919 Whitehall Circle
San Diego, CA 92126

Having just written the plot for no. 7, I will say only this much. Bridget herself has now joined the ranks of the grateful dead. It's not too late for you, too

I don't know if AZTEC ACE will print letters or continue to run Doug's "Disorientations 5:23" as a text page, but assuming there will be a letters page, my 20 cents' worth of comments are justified

AZTEC ACE is something very rare — a truly modern comic. Like First's *American Flagg!*, AZTEC ACE makes very few concessions to the lowest common denominator. Either you get it or you don't. The captions simulate real (if slightly "poetic") thoughts, unlike the captions in other comics which exist solely to explain action. One meets Ace on his terms, and without inane sugar-coating. It's experimental, and I hope the rest of your audience treasures it just as much as I do

The artwork is spectacular! Congratulations to

Michael Hernandez and Nestor Redondo! The colors were truly unusual — different, but somehow in keeping with the nature of the book. Were they painted?

Since Ace can travel through all of time, may I request that he someday visit the Crusades? Perhaps the Ebonati would be backing the Saracens while Ace sided with the Crusaders

May your clock never run down!

Tracey Emerson
282 Lowell Court
Park Forest, IL 60466

Yes indeed there will be a letter column, Tracey, and you're in it. The major flaw in issues 1 and 2 as far as I'm concerned, was our failure to drive this point home. Hell, we didn't even mention an address. Yet, as is obvious, letters got through anyway, proving that some of you are determined buggers if nothing else. Future communication is made easier via the address at the start of this lettercolumn. Veeb us, please, to the moon or sooner

As for this recurring comparison to *American Flagg!* well, since First Comics doesn't send complimentary copies, and since I live out in the wilds of Pennsylvania many, many miles from the nearest comics shop, I've yet to read an issue of *Flagg!* However, having heard extravagantly favorable things about the book (from those who hardly dispense encomiums lightly), and being a Chaykin fan (as well as 2-time collaborator) from way back, I am indeed eager to rectify this situation. Are you listening Howie? I need issues 1 through whatever you did yesterday (And don't forget about tomorrow . . .)

Dents and Phil's coloring process is some bizarre alchemy of cel vinyl "painting," colored pencils, and weird dyes or whatever

Coincidentally enough, a couple of Crusaders appear briefly in a special "fill-in" plot I just completed for Michael Hernandez. It's called "Picnics at Midnight" and you can look for it around no. 8 or 9 if you haven't seen it already

BELATED THANKS DEPARTMENT: Those who have commented on the beauty of the AZTEC ACE logo will be interested to know it is the work of DENIS McFARLING. Those who have admired the designs of the various Ebonati craft in issues 1 and 2 will be interested to know they are the work of JIM HERNANDEZ, brother of Michael Hernandez. (And no, for the tenth time, these two Hernandez Bros. are not related to THOSE two Hernandez Bros.) Thanks also go out (but not yet belatedly) to TOM YEATES for designing the lettercol logo which is gracing these very pages.

And finally, after so many years of writing so many Marvel lettercols (and even a few DC ones) in the annoyingly ingenious voice of the "editorial we," it is particularly refreshing at this new time to say that the above I is the me below.

— Doug Moench

Oh yeah, before I forget: Special Name-the-Camel Contest in issue no. 23; winners already notified



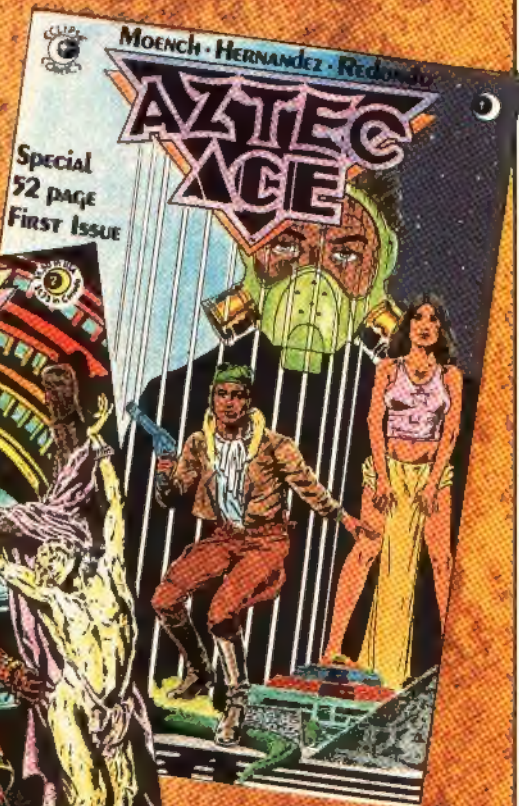
by Scott McCloud

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Notes from SURF CITY

by catherine yronwode

THE FIRST SUNBURN OF THE SEASON: Spring time is with us again; i can tell by the nifty airbrush effects on my skin. I look like something marked up for mechanical colour separations thusly: "Y2R2 fleshtone bathing suit image on Y2R3 hot pink skin/(A) airbrush lace trim on suit, backs of legs, shoulders, nose, etc." Ah, the first sunburn of the season! It stings for a little while, but it betokens so much pleasure yet to come. . .

One of the nicest of the pleasures heralded by spring's first sunburn is the annual Eclipse Summer Outing. Dean and i will be going to three comic book conventions this summer. For the employees of other comics houses, congoing usually means a hasty flight from one airport to another, a cab ride to some faceless hotel room, a few hours meeting and greeting anonymous fans, a cab ride back to the airport, a flight to the point of origin, and back to the office next morning.

We don't do things like that at Eclipse. For one thing, we are our own bosses, so we can give ourselves a break now and then. For another thing, we happen to enjoy the almost-lost American hobby of motoring. (For those who don't remember it, "motoring" means travelling by scenic routes from here to there and back again, stopping along the way to eat in small cafes, admire the view, take photographs of unusual examples of architecture, buy fresh fruit at roadside stands, and read all those little bronze historical markers describing famous battles and the birthplaces of presidents.)

But, you might be wondering, how do all the comic books get published if the editors and publishers are motoring hither and yon from one convention to another?

I'm glad you asked that. It gives me a chance to provide an unsolicited testimonial for our partners-in-motoring, the wonderful people who run the Federal Express courier service. You see, with Federal Express overnight delivery, we can telephone Mark Evanier in Los Angeles, tell him to send the next issue of *Crossfire* to the Federal Express Office in, say, New Orleans, pick up the book, proofread it in our hotel room, make whatever corrections are needed, drop it off at Federal for overnight delivery to the colour separators, and be on our way, motoring into the sunset with nary a wasted moment.

In fact, between telephone company calling cards, modem hook-ups for word processors to typesetting houses, Federal Express overnight service, and the like, it should be possible to edit and publish comics, books, and magazines while motoring cross country perpetually in nothing larger than an Airstream trailer. Hmmm. . . maybe next year. . .

Seriously though, Dean and i will be going to three comic cons this summer, and if you want to show us your portfolio, get advance info on upcoming Eclipse projects, or just come over and say hello, here's where to look for us:

San Diego Trade Expo/Comicon: June 26 - 27 is the Trade Expo for comics publishers; the regular Comicon runs from June 28 - July 1. In addition to the two of us, other Eclipse people present will be *Marshall Rogers* (*Cap'n Quick* and a *Foosle*, *Scorpio Rose*, *Coyote*), *B.C. Boyer*

(*The Masked Man*), *Mark Evanier*, *Will Meugniot*, *Dan Spigle*, *Al Gordon*, *Rick Hoberg* and others from the *DNAgents*, *Crossfire* and *Surge* crews. You'll also be able to meet many of the fine artists and writers whose work appears in *Star*Reach Classics*. San Diego is the Big One, so if you can make it, you'll be up to your eyeballs in comic book, newspaper strip, and underground writers and artists!

Dallas Fantasy Fair: July 6 - 8. This is a new one for us, and we're going there in hopes of meeting folks as yet unmet, looking over the portfolios of aspiring new artists, and checking out Dallas' contributions to the fine art of barbequing.

Atlanta Fantasy Fair: August 3 - 4. Having always enjoyed the work produced by Atlanta's semi-pro and fan publishers, we decided to attend the Atlanta con and see for ourselves what is going on in the area. Portfolio perusal and panel discussions will once again be the order of the day.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE FUNNYBOOK FARM: Time for a few words of unabashed editorial enthusiasm: Doug Wildey's magnificently drawn *Rio* series returns in *Eclipse Monthly* no. 9 and 10, with a gorgeous cover painting of *Rio* guaranteeing that issue no. 10 will jump right off the racks and into your arms! . . . Summer signals the coming of the *DNAgents Dynasty* as the stories in *DNAgents*, *Crossfire* and the *Surge* Miniseries weave in and out of each other under the direction of Mastermind Mark Evanier. . . In *Aztec Ace* no. 3 and 4, *Bridget* (and the readers!) begin to learn more about the quixotic Avenger of Time's Suffering, while *Ace* himself must travel to ancient Egypt in search of "Mummy Dust" and "Necropolis Nights" . . . *Zot!* is off to a hot start, and things get hotter - fast - as writer-artist Scott McCloud introduces the next Great Villain of our times - **DEKKO!** This guy is so bizarre he makes even the book's editors' short hairs tingle. Straight from the heart of the Collective Unconscious! . . . All you *Marshall Rogers* devotees can hang in there - 'cause *Cap'n Quick & a Foosle* is definitely wending its way toward you. More details next month on this and *Scorpio Rose*, which *Marshall* is producing with the help of *Michael Hernandez*. These two guys are working overtime to bring you the best art money can buy, so be patient and (dare i say it?) keep the faith! . . . Finally, *Howard Chaykin* fans should be on the look-out for *Star*Reach Classics* no. 5 because that's the one with *Chaykin* and *Len Wein's Gideon Faust* cover-featured and starring in his own full-colour adventure. It's a treat you will not want to miss!

Would you believe i've run out of hype for this month? You wouldn't? You mean you want me to remind you to put in your order for those fabulous Eclipse character tee-shirts you see advertised all over the place? You say you can't wait for me to explain the neat shipping schedule which will ensure that you can obtain a new *DNAgents Dynasty* title three out of every four weeks in the month? You hint that this edition of *Surf City* is incomplete without a glowing paean of praise for new *Sabre* artist *Jose Ortiz*? You ask for for updates on the exploits of *Ms. Tree* and *Destroyer Duck*?

Sorry. No can do. I'm out of space! Maybe next time, okay?
- cat

HE USED TO
WORK THE WRONG
SIDE OF THE
LAW... AND
EVERYBODY
WANTED HIM
DEAD.

NOW, HE WORKS
THE RIGHT SIDE
OF THE LAW.

... AND EVERYONE
STILL WANTS
HIM DEAD.



FROM THE PAGES OF

DNAGENTS

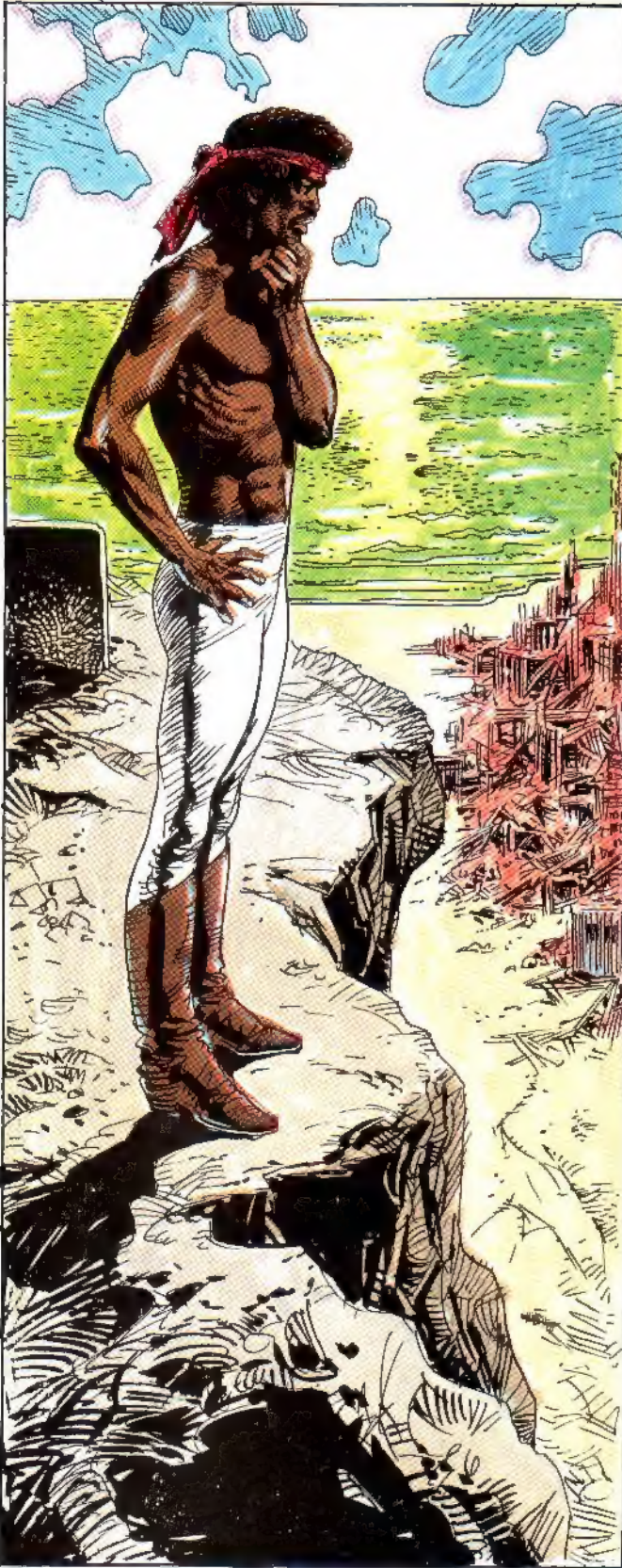
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